Mutual Charity, the most perfect Bond of Christian Unity.

A

SERMON

Preach'd before the

KING

IN THE

Royal Chapel at St. *James's*,

Upon *Sunday*, Jan. 5. 1717-8.

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Colos. III. 14.

And above all these Things, put on Charity, which is the Bond of Perfectness.

THE first and principal Design of the Gospel Dispensation was, to reconcile us to *God*. This our Saviour has done by *the Blood of his Cross*. Colos. i. 20. The next was, to unite us amongst *our selves*, that *as we are call'd in one Hope of our Calling*, Eph. iv. 4. so there might be but *one Body, and one Spirit*, in the Christian Church, under *one Head, even Christ*, who 15. is the sole *Master* and *Lawgiver* to Christians; *one Lord*, under *one God and Father* 5. *of all, who is above all, and through all,* 6. *and in us all.*

A SERMON *preach'd*

The uniting of Chriſtians in Love and Affection, being thus one main Deſign of the Goſpel; both our Saviour, and his Apoſtles, have been very frequent, and earneſt, in their Exhortations, to keep them mindful of this Duty. Our Lord has made it a peculiar and diſtinguiſhing Mark of our Relation to *him*, that we have a mutual Affection and Concern for
John xiii. 34. each other; *A new Commandment*, ſays he to his Apoſtles, when he was taking his Leave of them, *give I unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you, that*
35. *ye alſo love one another. By this ſhall all Men know that ye are my Diſciples, if ye have love one to another.* And again juſt be-
17, 18. fore his Crucifixion he prays, *Holy Father, keep through thine own Name, thoſe whom thou haſt given me, that they may be one, as we are.* And a little farther he
21. adds, *That they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they alſo may be one in us.*

The Apoſtles alſo of our Lord, do frequently in their Writings, in the moſt pathetical manner, preſs this Duty upon
1 Pet. iii. 8. us. They exhort us, *to be all of one Mind;*

Mind; having Compaſſion one of another, to love as Brethren. To put on, as the Elect of God, Holy and Beloved, Bowels of Mercies, Kindneſs, Humbleneſs of Mind, Meekneſs, Long-ſuffering; Forbearing one another, and Forgiving one another. And St. *Paul* ſays, *If there be any Conſolation in Chriſt, if any Comfort of Love, if any Fellowſhip of the Spirit, if any Bowels and Mercies; Fulfil ye my Joy, that ye be like-minded, having the ſame Love, being of one Accord, of one Mind.* And again, *We then that are ſtrong, ought to bear the Infirmities of the Weak, and not to pleaſe our ſelves.* He bids us to *receive him that is weak in the Faith* into our Communion, *but not to doubtful Diſputations*, not regarding his being of a different Opinion, in ſome indifferent Matters, from our ſelves. And that if we *have Faith, we ſhould have it to our ſelves before God*, and *not walk ſo uncharitably*, as to *deſtroy him*, by making a rigid indiſcreet uſe of our Liberty, *for whom Chriſt died. Let us therefore*, ſays he, *follow after the Things which make for Peace, and Things wherewith one may edify another.*

Coloſ. iii. 12, 13. Phil. ii. 1, 5. Rom. xv. 1, xiv. 1, 22, 15, 19.

If

If from these *Precepts* of Christ and his Apostles, we should make an Enquiry what has been the *Practice* of the Church upon them, it would give us but too just an Occasion to lament the degenerate State of Christianity; That *Peace*, and *Love*, and *Unity*, should be so earnestly recommended, and yet so little regarded. I need not put you in mind of the many Quarrels and Contentions among Christians in *former Ages*, and in distant Countries; how they have alternately vex'd and persecuted each other, upon the Account of their different Opinions about speculative Points, which have been *Circumstantial* only, and not *Essential* to their Religion. The present Quarrels and Fewds amongst *our selves*, and the many Sects, and Parties, and different Communions, into which we are divided, are sufficient to *shame* Us; and ought to put all wise and good Men upon endeavouring to find out some or other Christian and prudent Methods of *uniting* Us; that, how different soever our private Sentiments may be, in the *difficult* and *abstruse* Points of Revela-

tion, or in what is *not neceſſary* in Religion, we may all however, agree in Charity, and Brotherly Affection, and mutual Forbearance; and, if poſſible, join together in Chriſtian Communion; and *with one Mind, and one Mouth, glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.* xv. 6.

The Direction of the Apoſtle in my Text, would go a great way, if truly comply'd with, to accompliſh this great End; for if we had *more Charity*, and *leſs Pride*, We ſhould have a regard to *other Mens* Judgments as well as our *own*; and think it as reaſonable that *their* Eaſe, and Satisfaction, and Happineſs ſhould be conſulted by *Them*, as our *own* is by *Us*. *Charity* would dictate thus; and therefore the Apoſtle ſays, it is *the Bond of Perfectneſs*; that is, the *moſt perfect Bond of Union among Chriſtians.*

I ſhall beg leave to illuſtrate this Point more fully, by repreſenting to you, in the firſt place,

I. The Inſufficiency of *all other* Methods to preſerve Peace and Unity among Chriſtians.

II. I ſhall ſhew, how proper mutual *Charity* is to accompliſh this great and good End, and how effectually it would do it. And laſtly,

III. I ſhall exhort you to comply with the Injunction of our Apoſtle, *to put on Charity*, and ſhall offer ſome few *Directions* in order to promote it.

Firſt then I am to repreſent to you,

I. The Inſufficiency of *all other* Methods to preſerve Peace and Unity among Chriſtians.

That there are at preſent, and have been in all Ages of the Church, great Variety of Opinions, and different Judgments, in Matters relating to our Religion, is acknowledg'd on all Hands. And ſo long as there is any *Obſcurity* in any Parts of Divine Revelation; or that Men will be fond, and zealous, and impoſing of their *own Speculations*, in diſputable Points, and Matters not reveal'd; ſo long as Men are endow'd with different perſonal Affections, Conſtitutions, and *Capacities*; or have different kinds of *Education*, and more or leſs Opportunities of ſearching after and coming to

the Knowledge of the Truth; it is impossible, in these Circumstances, to avoid different Persuasions, and variety of Judgments amongst Men. And it is manifest, from the Precepts of the Gospel, and the Injunctions of Holy Scripture, that the *Christian Religion* is not grounded upon any Supposition, that it should be *otherwise*. On the contrary, it instructs Us, how we ought to *behave* our Selves towards each other in these Circumstances, *not to bite and devour one another*, Galat. v. 15. but to *walk with all Lowliness and Meekness, with Long-suffering, Forbearing one another in Love; endeavouring to keep the Unity of the Spirit*, notwithstanding any Diversity of Judgment, *in the Bond of Peace*. Ephes. iv. 2, 3.

Thus *Differences in Opinion* among Christians, in Matters *not Essential* to their Religion, but concerning Circumstantials only, either in Doctrine, or Worship, being very consistent with *Sincerity*, and a Love of *Truth*, they may be on both Sides, in some Measure *innocent*, and in some Degree *unavoidable*; and consequently they ought not to make any Breach in

our *Brotherly Love* and *Christian Charity*. And much less ought they to be the Occasion of *Hatred* and *Animosities*, and of *denying Communion* to one another; or of breaking the Bonds of Civil Society, by inflicting *Punishments* upon each other, and, like the *Jews* and *Samaritans*, having *no Dealings one with another*. These *Practices* certainly are highly *criminal*, and such as no Pretences to a better Understanding than our Neighbours can justify.

John iv. 9.

Now if we enquire what *Methods* have usually been taken to prevent this Diversity of Opinions among Christians, and these evil Consequences attending them; We shall find they have been chiefly these Three that follow. All of them of *Human Invention*, and all of them *fruitless* and *ineffectual*. And,

(1.) One Scheme for this End, has been to set up a *Magisterial Judge of Controversies*, whose *infallible* Judgment all private Christians must submit to, and implicitly acquiesce in. The Promoters of this Expedient for Unity among Christians, have been at a loss to make it appear from *Scripture*, that our Saviour Christ

Christ has actually constituted any such Judge upon Earth; and upon this Account they have very much differ'd among themselves, where they should *place him*; whether in the Chair of a *particular See*, or at the Head of a *General Council*. And the Result of all their Arguments on this side the Question, amounts to no more than this, That they conclude there *is* such a Judge, because, in their Opinion, it is highly fitting and necessary there *should* be such a one. Mistaking all along the Nature of the Christian Religion, as if it were necessary every Member of the Catholick Church should *agree in every particular Opinion*, or that there could be *no other Bond of Unity* without it.

But to leave the *Theory* of this Dispute; should we grant the Adversary, what is by no Means true, and what therefore he can have no Right to claim, or Reason to imagine, an *Infallible Chair*. Yet if we consult *Fact* upon it, that alone will shew how ineffectual this Expedient has been, and is sufficient to destroy all Pretensions to support it. For do we

not find, in such Countries, where the *Dictates* of *this Chair* are pretended to be receiv'd, even as the *Oracles of God*, that there are as many different *Opinions*, and warm *Disputes*, and malicious *Prosecutions*, and unchristian *Animosities*, about Matters, both as *little* and as *great*, as there are in any of those Places where its *Authority* is *rejected*? It is manifestly so. And therefore whatever, either *Shame*, or *Guilt*, is due to Christians, for their Treating each other with so much *Uncharitableness* and *Barbarity* upon the Account of their different Sentiments, as they have all in general but too much of this Kind to answer for, yet the *Adherers* to this Chair, must bear an *equal share* of the Burden of it, with those who *protest* against it. So that if the Experience of a *Thousand Years* may qualify us to judge of a proper Expedient to determine Controversies in Religion, and to preserve *Peace* and *Unity* among Christians, we have Reason to give it against this imaginary Establishment of a *Magisterial Infallible Judge*.

(2.) An-

(2.) Another Scheme for this purpoſe, contriv'd by Perſons who have thought the former both Unwarrantable and Inſufficient, has been, for ſome of the *chief Governours* of the Church to agree upon a *Sett of Principles*, and have them eſtabliſh'd as *true Doctrines* by *Publick Authority*; and then to require every Member of the Community, tho' perhaps not inwardly to *believe* them, yet to forbear either *ſpeaking* or *writing* againſt them.

Now this Expedient, how well ſoever it may be calculated to preſerve *Peace* among Chriſtians, is thought to be built upon a Foundation ſomewhat injurious to *Truth*, which may upon this foot be forc'd to give way to *groſs Errors* and *abominable Corruptions*. For ſhould it pleaſe God to permit, either *Iniquity to be eſtabliſh'd by a Law*, or the Governours of Chriſt's Church to be *greatly* and *grievouſly miſtaken*, which the Supporters of this Expedient muſt ſuppoſe *poſſible*, even upon their own Principle, that there is no *infallible* Authority in the Church; ſuppoſing this Caſe, I ſay, that *Error* ſhould

ever

ever get the *Aſcendant* over *Truth*, what poſſible Means would there be left to work a *Reformation*? The Profeſſors of true Religion muſt by this way be kept ever under a Cloud; and the cleareſt Light, and the ſtrongeſt Arguments, which Truth it ſelf can convey to the Mind of Man, muſt truckle and ſubmit to irreſiſtible Authority. But ſure *that* cannot be a proper Expedient for *Peace*, which is manifeſtly deſtructive of *Truth*; for *Peace* and *Truth* ought to *kiſs each other*. And it muſt be to promote the Intereſt of the *Father of Lies*, and *the Enemy of all Righteouſneſs*, to oblige Men to make *Profeſſion* of ſuch Doctrines as *true*, which they believe in their Conſciences to be *otherwiſe*. But laſtly,

Pſ. lxxxv. 10.
John viii. 44.
Acts xiii. 10.

(3.) There has been one other Scheme ſet on foot to preſerve Unity in the Church; but 'tis ſuch a one, that no one but *He* who *was a Murderer from the Beginning*, could have ſuggeſted, the *Deſtroying* all thoſe who are of a different Opinion from what ſhall be Eſtabliſh'd.

This indeed is a Method, were it conſtantly and univerſally practis'd, would

effectu-

effectually do the Work; but then, at the ſame Time, it would depopulate Kingdoms, and lay waſte whole Provinces, and perhaps in the End, bid fair for the Deſtruction of Mankind. Hiſtory well informs us what tragical Effects this Principle has occaſion'd in the Chriſtian World. Thouſands of innocent Lives have been ſacrificed to it in *France*, in *Italy*, in the *Low-Countries*, and in *theſe Kingdoms*; the Particulars of which Cruelties and Barbarities, ſhould they be here diſtinctly related, they muſt needs aſtoniſh, and chill the Blood of, every Hearer.

But *we* have not *ſo learnt Chriſt*, or Epheſ. iv. 20.
been taught by ſuch *inhumane* Arts as theſe, to propagate his Goſpel, and enlarge his Kingdom. He himſelf has told us, that *the Son of Man did not come* Luke ix. 56,
to deſtroy Men's Lives, but to ſave them; And therefore *we* cannot but *know*, what they *themſelves do not*, *what manner of* 55,
Spirit ſuch Perſons are of, who are for *calling Fire from Heaven, to conſume* all thoſe 54.
who differ from them; and think the *burning* of Hereticks the propereſt Method to *reclaim* them. Thus

Thus every Expedient of this Kind, which *Human* Invention has found out for the uniting of Christians, has prov'd either insufficient in it self, injurious to Truth, or destructive of the Happiness and Comfort of Mankind in Civil Society; upon which Account, we may safely conclude all, and each of them, to be utterly inconsistent with the *Divine* Will. Which brings me to consider in the next place, what *Christ* and his *Apostles* have directed to this purpose. Or to shew,

II. How proper mutual *Charity* is to accomplish this great and good End, and how effectually it would do it.

Of all the Virtues in the Christian Catalogue, we find none either so frequently recommended, or so highly extoll'd, as that of *Charity*; 'Tis said in Scripture, to Gal. v. 14. *fulfil* the *whole Law*, and to be 1 Tim. i. 5. *the End of the Commandment*, and that 'tis the *want* of this, or the *swerving from it*, which 6. makes Men *turn aside unto vain Jangling*. 'Tis a Principle that must run through all our Duty, and that will direct and lead us to every Branch of it; For *Love* Rom. xiii. 10. *worketh no ill to his Neighbour*; and all the

the kind Actions that flow towards him will produce *no good* to *our ſelves*, or find any Acceptance with God, unleſs they are ſeaſon'd and ſanctify'd with this Chriſtian Diſpoſition; For, ſays the Apoſtle, *tho' I beſtow all my Goods to feed the Poor, and give my Body to be burn'd, and have not Charity, it profiteth me Nothing.* Nay, he prefers *this Grace* before, even the *miraculous* Gifts of the Spirit; *Tho' I ſpeak*, ſays he, *with the Tongues of Men and Angels; And tho' I have the Gift of Prophecy, and underſtand all Myſteries, and all Knowledge; And tho' I have all Faith, ſo that I could remove Mountains, and have no Charity, I am Nothing.* And again, *Charity never faileth; but whether there be Propheſies, they ſhall fail; whether there be Tongues, they ſhall ceaſe; whether there be Knowledge, it ſhall vaniſh away.* And ſo he concludes, *Now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity, theſe three, but the greateſt of theſe is Charity.* 1 Cor. xiii. 3, 1, 2, 6, 13.

What now may not be expected, from a Diſpoſition of Mind, that has ſo *exalted* an Encomium, as the fore-mention'd, paſs'd upon it, by an inſpired Apoſtle; were it fix'd *univerſally* in the Heart, as

it ought to be, of every Chriſtian? There is one thing, indeed, of ſo odious and frightful a Nature, that *Charity it ſelf* ought not to be reconcil'd to; and that is, *Sin*; Practices that are directly contrary to the plain Precepts of the Goſpel, and the Injunctions of our
2 Cor. xvi. 14, Bleſſed Saviour. There muſt be *no Fellowſhip of Righteouſneſs, with Unrighteouſneſs*, or *Communion of Light, with Darkneſs*. For *what Concord hath Chriſt, with* Belial? *or what part hath he that Believeth, with an Infidel? And what Agreement hath the Temple of God, with Idols? Idolatry*, and *Sin*, muſt upon all Occaſions be ſhunn'd by every Chriſtian. No Compliances muſt be ſubmitted to, that would involve us in the Guilt of *theſe Tranſgreſſions*. For, ſays the Scripture, *Come out from among them, and be ye ſeparate, ſaith the Lord, and touch not the unclean Thing, and I will receive you.*

But as for ſome Differences in Opinion, among Chriſtians, in *ſmaller Matters*, theſe ſure may be brought within the reach of our *mutual Charity*, and may be either heal'd, or overlook'd, by our *For-*

Forbearing one another in Love. Variety of Judgments in these Points, is not of that Consequence, either to *them* or *Us*, as that we should raise Animosities about it, and put odious Marks of Distinction upon each other, or avoid each other's Society and Communion, *living in Malice,* Tit. iii. 3. *and Envy, hateful, and hating one Another.* There can be no Argument drawn, barely from Brethren's differing in their Opinions, to justify these Proceedings; And therefore 'tis our common Duty, to let Charity put an End to them. They must be of a *very malignant* Nature, if so soveraign a Remedy as this cannot stop the Disorder; For hear how *far* the Apostle extends it; *Charity suffereth long,* 1 Cor. xiii. 4, *and is kind, Charity envieth not: Charity vaunteth not it self, is not puffed up. Doth not behave it self unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no* 5, *Evil. Rejoyceth not in Iniquity, but rejoyceth in the Truth. Beareth all things,* 6, 7. *believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.* Now what Disputable *Opinions* are there to be met with amongst Christians, but what, *as such,* may, upon

this *charitable* extenſive Principle, be tolerated and born with? Every Thought which is conſiſtent with *Sincerity* and *Virtue*, is conſiſtent with the *Liberty* of the Chriſtian Religion; and ought not therefore, upon its Religious Account, to expoſe the Perſon, in whoſe Breaſt it is found, either to inward Hatred, or outward Puniſhment.

Thus mutual *Charity*, and *that alone*, is comprehenſive enough to *unite* the differing Sentiments of Chriſtian Brethren. And ſince it is *impoſſible* all their Thoughts ſhould exactly run in the ſame Channel, it will appear, that this is the *moſt fit* and *proper* Bond of Unity for them, if we carry in our Minds theſe three Reflections.

(1.) That no Man can *help* his *own Opinion*, or ſo command his own Judgment, as to *Think what he pleaſes*. For the Underſtanding follows not the Will, but the Will the Underſtanding. Our Conceptions of Things will be ſuch as the Evidences of them appear to Us, and as our Capacities can receive them; And therefore the Man, who, in the utmoſt Sincerity of his Soul, uſes all the Means

he has in his Power to inform his Judgment aright, as to the Truth of Things, cannot possibly incur any *Guilt*, however his Thoughts happen to be determin'd. For what can Human Abilities do more? Such a Man's *Conscience* must be *innocent*, however his *Judgment* may be *mistaken*. How reasonable then must it be, for the *Affections* of common Brethren to be united in *Charity*, when their different *Apprehensions* of Things may be on both Sides *unavoidable*? And how *absurd* an *Attempt* it is, to *force* a *Belief* of *Truth*? And how *wicked* a *Practice*, to *punish Involuntary Error*? I will leave this Reflection upon you in the Words of a famous Writer; 'I am sure, says he, *God* does *Chillingworth.*
'not, and therefore *Man* ought not to re-
'quire more of any Man, than to Believe
'the Scripture to be the Word of God,
'to endeavour to find out the true Sense
'of it, and to live according to it. But

(2.) It is highly fit and reasonable, That Charity should be extended towards such of our Brethren whose Opinions differ from our own, because it is possible, *They* may be in the *Right*, and *We* may

be

be in the *Wrong*. This Argument, indeed, will loſe its Force upon ſuch Chriſtians, who pleaſe themſelves with a Fancy, that they have got *Infallibility* on their Side. There is no arguing upon that Suppoſition. But to Perſons who are perſwaded, that all *Human* Judgment is liable to *Error*, it muſt appear in its full Strength; and will preſs hard for *Charity* towards *Others*, if it meets but with a tolerable Degree of *Modeſty* and *Humility* in *our ſelves*. If we will not let other Men's Thoughts run as freely as our own, we ſhall be as likely to eſtabliſh *Error*, as ſet up *Truth*; And may, poſſibly, in our Zeal againſt the *Powers of Darkneſs*, be in reality *found*, *to fight againſt God*. Again, Laſtly,

Acts v. 39.

(3.) Charity is a Debt due to our Brethren who differ from us, tho' we are ever ſo certain of their being in the *Wrong*; becauſe the *bare Opinions* of *Others*, can never *hurt Us*. We can receive no Damage, either in our Temporal or Spiritual Concerns, from the miſtaken Speculations of other Men, in Points of Religion. If any practical

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ill Conſequences flow from them, which would affect the Welfare of *Civil Society*, 'tis the Buſineſs of good Government to prevent them; but Religious Opinions, as *ſuch*, affect no Body but the Perſons who conceive them; who alone are to anſwer to *God* for the *Regularity* and *Sincerity* of them. *Who art thou*, therefore, *that judgeſt another Man's Servant?* ſays the Apoſtle, *to his own Maſter he ſtandeth or falleth.* 'Tis our *own Faith*, and *good Lives* that we are anſwerable for, and that muſt juſtify us before God: And we ought, both in Juſtice and Charity, to leave *Others* to their own Prudence and Conduct, in the Management of *their* Spiritual Concerns. Rom. xiv. 4.

Thus reaſonable is it, that Charity *ſhould* do, and thus it effectually *would do*, what Force and Violence *never can*, viz. Unite the Hearts and Affections of Chriſtian Brethren, whoſe Perſwaſions happen to be different in ſome of the *leſſer* Points of Religion. And we may truly ſay, agreeably to the Apoſtle in my Text, as well as to the whole Scheme, and main Principles of our Holy Religion,

gion, that *That* is the *most perfect Community of Christians*, not which makes a rigid Profession of the *truest Doctrinal System*, but which has the *most extensive Charity* towards their Fellow Christians of a different Persuasion. Let me therefore take the Liberty, in the last Place,

III. To exhort all that are here present, to comply with the Apostle's Injunction in my Text, and *put on Charity*; and likewise to offer some few short *Directions* in order to promote it.

I might make use of many Topicks of Persuasion to exhort you to this Duty of *putting on Charity*; but I shall chuse to recommend this Christian Disposition towards such who differ in their Opinions from Us, by leaving upon your Thoughts these two principal Considerations.

(1.) That leaving Mankind to a free and unrestrain'd Liberty in the framing of their Judgments and Opinions of Things, would be of great Service to the Interest of *Truth*, and the *Purity* of the *Christian Religion*. 'Tis Error only and Mistake, that is afraid of a full and impar-

impartial Examination. It must be for the Advantage of Truth, to appear in as much Light as possible. It wants nothing but a fair Field to make its Defence, and to crown it self with Victory. Whereas, when a Man finds, in his pursuit of Truth, that unless his Thoughts are confin'd to the beaten Road, he shall be expos'd to Shame, or Hatred, or Punishment from other Men; this will be very apt to bias his Understanding, and mislead his Judgment; it will make him shy of Evidence, and afraid of better Light; and in Points of Religion, will destroy his Sincerity, and with it the solid Peace and Comfort of his Mind.

(2.) As an universal Charity amongst Brethren, whose Opinions differ from each other, would be highly advantageous to Truth; so would it effectually secure the Peace and Quiet of Civil Society: Which is another Consideration proper to recommend it. It is not the Diversity of Men's Opinions, in Matters of Religion, that has been, *in it self*, the Occasion of that Distraction and Confusion which the Christian World has hitherto groan'd under;

But it has been the Manner of treating Mens Perſons *without Charity*, and *without Mercy*, upon this account, that has caus'd theſe Diſorders. On the contrary, let there be but a Foundation laid, of Security to Men, that they ſhall not be Sufferers in their *Temporal* Concerns, upon the account of their *Religious* Perſwaſions, and there would be an End at once of all theſe Diſturbances. This would unite Men in Love and Affection, promote good Neighbourhood, and take away all Strife about Superiority, and the Pre-eminence. And thus would Governments be ſtrengthen'd, and have no occaſion to ſtrike in with the Humours of particular Parties. But all good Subjects equally finding their Intereſts promoted, and their Safety preſerv'd, in the ſame Government, would with Chearfulneſs and Unanimity ſupport, what all were eaſy and ſatisfy'd in.

Let every Chriſtian therefore, both as he regards the Intereſt of true Religion, and the Welfare of Civil Society, *put on Charity himſelf*, and uſe his utmoſt Endeavours in his proper Station, to inſtil the ſame

ſame good Principle into *Others*; that Differences in Opinion among common Brethren, may no longer divide their Affections; or cauſe them to treat each other as Enemies. And I ſhall ſhut up this Diſcourſe by hinting a few ſhort *Directions*, which I conceive may be ſerviceable to this End. The 1*ſt* is,

1. To bring a *Simplicity of Mind* along with us in all our Religious Diſputes, and not to let corrupt Paſſions or Intereſts intermix themſelves in theſe Debates. If a Love of *Truth* had been the only Motive, which had carry'd Men into Religious Controverſies, it is probable the World would have been much *leſs* troubled with them than it has been. But *ſecular Intereſts* and *worldly Views* have been carry'd on under this Pretence, and have been the *true* and *real* Occaſion of theſe Contentions. It would be but an eaſy Matter, to forbear, and forgive, the bare different *Perſwaſions* of other; 'tis their interfering with Us in Matters of *another Nature*, that gives birth to our Quarrels, widens our Breaches, and enflames our

Paſſions. We find it turns to our own Account, to keep others in Diſrepute; and this ſpurs us on to render their Character odious, and to give them no Quarter. Either we are addicted to ſome *Party*, whoſe Intereſt, right or wrong, muſt be promoted; or our *Credit* is concern'd to maintain ſome Tenets we have eſpous'd; or perhaps we want to be *reveng'd* of ſome Perſon, or Perſons, who have been the Occaſion of our receiving ſome Diſappointment or Diſadvantage. Theſe *baſe* and *ſordid Ends* are but too often at the bottom of our Diſputes. And therefore, till we can diveſt our Minds of them, we muſt expect to be *always wrangling*, and never at Peace with each other.

2. Another Means to prevent our Contentions and Animoſities about Religion would be, to uſe our ſelves to diſtinguiſh between what is *neceſſary*, and what is *not neceſſary* in it; between Matters of *Faith*, and Matters of *Opinion*; and not ſtickle with an *equal* Zeal and Earneſtneſs for *both*. This would take off a great deal of that Fewel, which

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the Paſſions of Men blow up into a Flame, and thereby diſturb the Peace, and deſtroy the Happineſs of Society. They are *the private Notions* of Men, and not the *plain Truths* of the *Goſpel*, which are generally the Subject of theſe Diſputes. And 'tis the impoſing theſe *Opinions* of *ſome*, as *neceſſary Doctrines* upon *others*, that creates all our Quarrels, and ever muſt produce Oppoſition. Whereas, let but Men have a *free Liberty*, as they ought, of judging for themſelves in theſe Points, and abound in their *own* Senſe, as they are willing that others ſhould abound in *theirs*; there would be little or nothing then left to quarrel about. For the *neceſſary* Articles of Faith, are but very *few*, and ſo *plainly* and *clearly* expreſs'd in Scripture, that an honeſt and ſincere Mind cannot *miſtake* them. And thus might Chriſtians at once contract their *Diſputes*, and enlarge their *Charity*; And they would at the ſame Time conſult the *Honour of Religion*, and the *Welfare of Society*. Laſtly,

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3. It would be a farther Means to produce Peace, and Love, and Unity, among Christians, if we would all remember, That the great and principal Thing the Gospel points at, is not *Speculation*, but *Practice*; That it does not aim so much at the rectifying our *Opinions*, as the Regulation of our *Manners*. But how little Emulation is there seen among Christians, who shall most excel in *virtuous Actions*? When do we vie with each other, who shall lead the *best Life*? Yet this is the indispensible *Duty* of every Christian, and what is *plainly reveal'd*, and what is absolutely *necessary* to his Salvation. But *disputable Opinions* are of such a Nature, that honest Men, and good Christians, may have their Judgments determin'd on *either side* the Question, and yet still retain their *Integrity*, and be entitled to the *Favour of God*. Let us therefore for the future, fix Religion upon its true Foundation, and place it in the *Heart*, more than in the *Head*. And when our Souls are season'd with *true* and *inward Piety*, our *Affections* will be enlarg'd towards our

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Brethren, and our *Charity* extended to the *whole Creation of God*. We ſhall then caſt off all *Narrowneſs of Spirit*, which cramps our Thoughts, and confines our Underſtandings to the *particular Syſtems* of this or that *Sect* and *Party* of Chriſtians; and we ſhall need no other Recommendation of any one to our ſincere Love and cordial Affections, but his having the *Image of God*, and the Superſcription of the *Holy Jeſus* ſtamp'd upon him.

Thus, and thus only, can we hope to ſee *Primitive Chriſtianity* reſtor'd among Us, when *Peace*, and *Love*, and *Unity* amongſt themſelves, diſtinguiſh'd all Chriſtians from the Unbelieving Part of Mankind. And thus may We, in due Time, bring in the Accompliſhment of thoſe glorious *Predictions*, in which *perfect Tranquility* is promis'd to the Church of Chriſt; When *the Wolf* Iſa. xi. 6. *ſhall dwell with the Lamb, and Leopard lie down with the Kid, and the Calf, and the young Lion, and the Fatling together, and a little Child ſhall lead them.* When *Ephraim ſhall not envy* Judah, 13.

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nor Judah *vex* Ephraim. When there ſhall be *no hurting, or deſtroying in all God's Holy Mountain.* Which peaceable and happy State of Chriſtianity, may God, in his Wiſdom, find proper Means to eſtabliſh among Us. *Amen.*

FINIS.

MVSEVM BRITAN NICVM